Offers the World's Masterpieces of Literature at a Gulp

Best Novels Condensed

Plots of One Hundred Fictional Works Offered in Capsule Form

AN AMBITIOUS attempt to cram culture into the compass of four small volumes is "One Hundred Best Novels Condensed" (Harpers), edited by Edwin A. Grozier, editor of "The Boston Post." Mr. Grozier explains that the object of the capsule classics is "First, to enable the busy and casual reader to become acquainted with the masterpieces of fiction with the minimum of time and exertion; second, through an appetizing condensation to induce readers to seek the great originals."

It is a simple matter to wax maliciously satirical over the notion of taking a condensed novel with your breakfast coffee, but good summaries of standard plots are not only valuable, but difficult to make. Mr. Grozier's disciples, as a whole, have done well their task of reducing such massive works as "Vanity Fair" to 1,500 words, but the reduction in almost all cases is to too minute a scale. When it comes down to a question of mere plot interest "Uncle Tom's Cabin" makes a better 1,500-word scenario than "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," which Mr. Grozier has enterprisingly included. Readers who "seek the great originals" on a basis of the "appetizing condensations" will, like the lady in Irving Berlin's ditty, be surprised.

There may be some first class paper battles arising from Mr. Grozier's selection of the hundred best novels, which, he admits, are matters of personal preference beyond the first fifty. The presentation of "East Lynne," even in condensed form, as a "best novel" is rather entertaining, and there be those who will cry out against Clark Russell, two books by Bulwer-Lytton, "Sir Nigel," "The Prisoner of Zenda," "Ben-Hur," "Thaddeus of Warsaw," "Little Women," "The Shuttle" and three stories by Winston Churchill. Mr. Churchill, by the way, is honored by having his condensations made by ex-Governor McCall of Massachusetts, Senator Walsh and ex-President Taft. In fact, almost every one within a day's journey from Boston, except Babe Ruth, has helped to squeeze the novels to size.

Mr. Grozier probably will win many friends by the selection of "Alice in Wonderland" and "Trilby" for his volumes, and he has not neglected Hardy, Gorki, Wells, Kipling, Barrie and Tolstoy, although one wonders why Arnold Bennett was not admitted to the compendium. "Tom Jones" is missing, as it always is in respectable lists of best novels. But does not the editor maintain that "an effort has been made to avoid morbid, abnormal and otherwise objectionable works of imagination and to give preference to healthy, natural, inspiring fiction?" After all, "East Lynne" and "Little Women" are in pretty good company in this series of masticated masterpieces.

A Disciple of Nietzsche

Modern Spirit Analyzed in Series of Essays by Young Scotchman

IF IMITATION be the sincerest form of flattery, Mr. Edwin Muir may be counted a most devout worshiper at the shrine of Friedrich Nietzsche. His collection of essays "We Moderns," the fourth of Alfred A. Knopf's Free Lance Books, reveals the influence of the German iconoclast down to the most minute details of style. Mr. Muir employs most of Nietzsche's familiar devices of expression. He writes in disconnected paragraphs, which he groups occasionally under loose titles. His paragraphs vary greatly in contents, from learned disquisitions to paradoxical epigrams. As in the case of Nietzsche, they frequently end on a provocative interrogation point.

It would be quite impossible for any one to imitate Nietzsche's thought through all its twists and evolutions; but the author adopts as cardinal articles of his faith Nietzsche's aversion to Christianity and democracy and his passionate desire for a reversion to Greek habits of thinking and living. Mr. Muir's phrases often possess a genuine Nietzschean ring, keen and bitter and fiercely insistent upon the rights of the individual genius as against the vulgar herd.

"What, then, is equality but the infinitely consoling consciousness of tainted creatures that every one on this earth is tainted?"

"The best we can do, then, is to inaugurate a society in which great men will find it possible to live, will be even encouraged to live."

Do not these sentences suggest "Beyond Good and Evil" and "Human, All Too Human"? Mr. Muir is also Nietzschean to the core in his contemptuous anti-utilitarianism, in his insistence upon the spiritual need for leisure, in his denunciation of the tendency to turn the whole human race into an industrial machine. The following passage expresses his attitude so well that it is worth quoting in its entirety:

"The very greatest danger confronts a people who renounce leisure—that people will become shallow—just consider England. For of all things noble it is hard to see the immediate utility: patience and reverence are needed before one can see in them a meaning at all. Art, literature and philosophy are not obvious goods. At the first glance they appear even repellent. Alas, then, for them in an age of first glances. In such an age, it is true, they will not altogether disappear. Something worse will happen. They will be degraded, made obvious, misunderstood; in one word, popularized—the fate of our time. Society should be organized so as to give to its members the maximum of leisure. Thus would the dissemination of art and philosophy be made at least possible. But society should at the same time provide for a privileged class of artists and philosophers, with absolute leisure, who would work only when the inner compulsion made them. The second condition is at least as important as the first."

The author pours out vials of scorn upon the modern realistic novel. To him this form of literature implies at once lack of taste and poverty of creative genius. What is easier, and what is more stupid, than a photographic reproduction of the drab details of everyday life? What is needed is selection, compression, judicious omission. But these processes demand artistic discrimination, and it is just that quality that the modern realists lack.

Despite its obvious genesis in Nietzsche, Mr. Muir's work is by no means destitute of original value. In the first place the author interprets his master faithfully and adequately—a feat that has seldom been achieved. "We Moderns" is really the quintessence of Nietzsche, Nietzsche less gorgeously mad, Nietzsche less of a rhapsodist and more of a rationalist. Then, as H. L. Mencken points out in his introduction, Muir is able to go further than Nietzsche in some fields on account of the tremendous development of psychological science during the last three decades.

Moreover, no true disciple of Nietzsche can be a mere servile copyist. Nietzsche never desired to set up a personal cult; he never attempted to rally a band of believers about the standard of his own dogmas. On the contrary, his great value, as Dr. Georg Brandes says, lies in the fact that he is a liberating force, a mighty factor in the development of the individual personality. Muir partakes of this liberating force without in any way surrendering his own independence of thought. He is well worth reading for his understanding and interpretation of Nietzsche. But he is equally well worth reading for his own keen, vigorous and incisive comments upon modern life and modern thought.

Books Received

Fiction

THE PASSION FOR LIFE. By Joseph Hocking. Published by Fleming H. Revell Company, New York.

A romance in which religion, the war and the desire to pierce the veil of death play important parts.

SHORT AND SWEET. By H. N. Gittins. Published by John Lane Company, New York.

Short stories and writings by the late Captain Harry Neville Gittins, of the British Army.

THE NUT CRACKER. By Frederick S. Isham. Published by The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis.

The story of a man who escaped a run of bad luck by suddenly putting on a new personality.

ECHO. By Sydney Tremayne. Published by John Lane Company, New York.

A story of English life by the author of "The Auction Mart."

Biography

FURTHER INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A MINING ENGINEER. By E. T. McCarthy. Published by E. P. Dutton & Co., New York.

This volume, a continuation of "Incidents in the Life of a Mining Engineer," contains many interesting reminiscences by a man whose work has taken him into many out-of-the-way corners of the world.

STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS. By Louis Howland. Published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

An excellent biography of the famous Democratic leader, who participated in the historic debate with Abraham Lincoln. The work is published in the "Figures from American History" series.

Spiritualism

THE OPEN VISION. By Horatio W. Dresser. Published by Thomas F. Crowell Company, New York.

A study of psychical phenomena which attempts to point the way beyond mere phenomena to clear knowledge of the human spirit and spiritual life.

SPIRITUALISM. By Coulson Kernahan. Published by Fleming H. Revell Company, New York.

A severe denunciation of spiritualism from the standpoint of Christian faith.

Miscellaneous

THE RACIAL PROSPECT. By Seth K. Humphrey. Published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

A study of many phases of race building, including race heritage, breeding, inborn qualities, the effects of immigration, etc.

PRIMITIVE SOCIETY. By Robert H. Lowie. Published by Boni & Liveright, New York.

An elaborate scientific study of the customs of the primitive races by the assistant curator of anthropology at the New York Museum of Natural History.

JOSLYN GRAY, author of "The January Girl," published by Charles Scribner's Sons

The Balkan Belgium

Serbia's Heroic War Record Vividly Described by Correspondent

"FROM Serbia to Jugoslavia," by Gordon Gordon-Smith (Putnam's), is an unusually valuable, although somewhat belated, war book. As an eyewitness the author describes the tragic collapse of the Serbian armies before the German Bulgarian invasion in the fall of 1915 and their subsequent brilliant recovery on the Salonica front. His account of the retreat of the Serbian forces over a succession of bleak mountain ranges to the Albanian coast—a retreat more beset with difficulties than the march of Xenophon's Ten Thousand—is full and vivid and interspersed with many personal anecdotes.

Mr. Gordon-Smith is a sharp critic of allied policy in the Balkans. He asserts with conviction that if the Allies had despatched an expeditionary force to Serbia in 1915 Greece and Rumania would have taken up arms against the Central Powers, Bulgaria would have been immobolized, Turkey would have been isolated, and the conclusion of the war would have been greatly hastened. He also maintains that it was a serious strategic blunder to treat Salonica as a minor and defensive front.

There was unquestionably much political and military mismanagement in the failure to relieve Serbia in the fall of 1915. The allied statesmen were grossly misled by Czar Ferdinand of Bulgaria. But Mr. Gordon-Smith seems eo exaggerate the possibilities of the Salonica front.

Serbia may fairly be called the Balkan Belgium. She was also marked for destruction by the Teutonic military machine on the most frivolous and insincere pretexts. But more fortunate than Belgium, she was able to stand off her invaders for more than a year. Even taking into consideration the indifferent quality of the Austro-Hungarian troops and the defensive advantages afforded by the mountainous country south of the Danube, the successful resistance of the Serbs to the greatly superior forces hurled against them reflects great credit upon the abolity of their generals and the patriotism and fighting spirit of their troops. The breakdown in the fall of 1915 cannot be ascribed to any deficiency on Serbia's part. The little country was simultaneously invaded from the north and from the east by German, Austrian and Bulgarian forces, which possessed an overwhelming superiority both in men and in guns.

General Putnik, the Serbian commander in chief, played his losing game to the end with unfaltering skill and tenacity. He moved his small armies from position to position to escape the constant enveloping movements of the invaders, and succeeded in saving at least the nucleus of a new fighting machine by retreating into Albania. From this region the Serbs were transported on Italian ships to Corfu, an island which acquired some fame as a battleground as early as the Peloponnesian War. Then after being thoroughly rehabilitated, they were sent to the Salonica front, where they played a leading part in the capture of Monastir and in the final victorious advance that eliminated Bulgaria from the war.

"Many Junes"

Fine Novel of English Life by Archibald Marshall

AFTER reading "Many Junes" (Dodd, Mead & Co.) with a high sense of discovery, it is disconcerting to find that the paper jacket holds the names of fourteen other novels by Archibald Marshall. It is a conviction of humiliating ignorance, or is the reviewer the victim of a conspiracy to keep Mr. Marshall the exclusive property of a small and select coterie of connoisseurs.

But the sincerity and charm, the real excellence of "Many Junes" is too rare to be long kept the property of the merely literary. With its lovely, poetic transcription of the English countryside, its tranquility and simplicity, "Many Junes" has the deceptive air of being idyllic and romantic. It takes a little while to see that its gentle poetry is really an iron sort of realism—its graciousness an acquiescence to life on its own incomprehensible terms. A really poignant realization of beauty fills it—the sense that life never can be as beautiful as it seems. And there hangs over it, too, the gallant and wistful gayety which is the finer distillation of the English spirit.